

walk casually along

# Walk Casually Along

A Collection of Unrefined Short Stories

Written by Neikos Seiche

## The day mars was born and the harshness of sing song phrases

Up in the splendid iridescent sky appeared a blob of utter blackness. A splotch of ink darker than darkest night, filled with more stars than had ever been imagined. Its presence was sinister, a looming formless scowl which grew steadily and imperceptibly slow. It lacked the comprehensibility one comes to expect in a civilization thoroughly advanced through the ranks of developmental potentials. This disparity irritated the mind with its strangeness; its mysterious cloudlike ambiguity was a looming nuisance. Nevertheless, no amount of hostility would overcome the nagging persistence of that darkness.

So, in haste and vain, research groups raced up to decipher the mystery. They, of course, never returned, relaying nothing. Thus, a race who knew utter calm for millennia found a great discomfort rapidly growing into fever pitched terror as they helplessly stared in awe of the maleficent obscurity looming overhead; the hungry maw, sedately gazing back down upon.

Out of nowhere, the uncanny grew rapidly into horror. The black star filled mass seemed to begin inhaling the sky. The dark splotch swelled into a twisted sickening mouth inhaling the zenith of the world. This sucking gob widened rapidly and everything began to happen exponentially; indeed it was. The world and everything in it watched helplessly as the sky quietly streamed out into the great chasm of space like smoke dissipating into ether.

On the ground everyone could feel the air grow into a cuttngly thin glacial chill which suddenly started tugging them upwards. Then, in another flash of an instant the silent black lake in the sky grew massive, swallowing everything into itself. Every molecule of the planet ripped out into blissful starry space. It spared not a mite. Life and all manner of such vanished, dispersing amongst the void, gentle, weightless, out adrift in a newfound silent expanse.

Over time all of the aspects of that planet, the water, the bodies, the plants, the trees, the stones, the bacteria, the algae, the threads of hair, the strands of spider web, the metals, the molds, the tiles, the soil and the gases

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## **If Ever**

Once upon a time a sun rose over a hill and turned everything to dust. The sky was purple with ill heat. The only life that remained was in the ocean, the way “god intended” said the preachers, but they were hushed.

Much time passed until finally that sun descended behind that hill and darkness revived all that had been turned to dust. The preachers said nothing, everyone was quiet trying to understand what had taken place.

all congealed into one gigantic mass. Every bit of it, save for the mountains and deeply compressed clays; the worlds hidden by time’s compounding nature. All substance of the planet formed itself into a strange bilious ball and drifted, a bit menacingly, a bit morosely, with weird determination, away from its dead mother’s orbit. Drifted and drifted, aloft in that vastness, quiet, calm, one might even call it gestating.

Quite some time later, a planet came into its view. This one, closer to the sun, still alive, still well, still shrouded in atmosphere. This one and the wandering mass, one day, collided. A great upheaval of planetary substance took place; an ejection of matter from the introduction of matter; call it equivalent exchange. The displaced piece hugging the gravity of its self, its world, became, eventually a new sphere, a cold, distant sphere, longing for reunion with itself, pulling.

The nomadic mass discovered accommodations; its myriad forms of seed began to unfurl in this weird warm world; concepts began to mingle with one another, new realities found new possibility and as such this reality we adore began to take shape and begin to root.

Eventually everyone noticed the sun’s increasing intensity, it touched on something uncanny familiar, but the notes, striking strings which traveled far back to an ancient memory, were far too much for comprehension to bare.

## **Dream Sequitur**

After I escaped the heist I needed to pay the mechanic \$40 for fixing the getaway vehicle. I offered him \$100 since we had billions in the car. He then said the bill was \$120 and I had to haggle him back down to \$100. In the backseat a friend had a tourniquet on their leg which was bleeding badly from a shotgun wound.

It was a good heist, we didn't even know what we were going to find. Sheets of world currency, all the colors of the rainbow.

## **Transmission From Within An N95**

Since August of 1977 has the SETI Institute has not heard anything else from the transmission source hidden deep within the vicinity of the Sagittarius constellation. Today, however, after 45 years, a new one encoded broadcast found its way from there to here upon the same narrow band of radio signal. A young person, Valentina Benali from Northern Arizona, a member of the Dine Tribe, hearing about the SETI decoding sweepstakes, submitted an ingenious method which the institute was able to use immediately to decipher this latest transmission. Here is a rough transcript of the message:

*Dear Earth listeners, you have not heeded our advice for too many of your sun cycles, we have grown concerned and are again reaching to you. We have been observing you for many aeons. We find Earth very pleasing to our senses. Someday we hope to visit, however, we see that decision as still very dangerous for us and will not do so for another many aeons.*

*We need to tell you that we can find no answers to the vast and persistent problems that plague you, except for this: You must immediately destroy totally and completely the enemies of Earth which you generally refer to as "leaders, businessmen, government & police" and all others of their ilk.*

*We, ourselves, elsewhere, unbiased by your gravity, refer to them likewise. Good luck, act swiftly and rejoice in the results.*

The reward for the decoding and potential ability to now communicate with the transmission source is quite grandiose. All of the expenses wrought on her lands and her people by the Peabody coal mining company are to be repaid in double with interest. The company must also fund immediately the remediation of the land they destroyed so violently and cease any further mining operations permanently. Any funds which they are not able to provide will be taken from all of the cities which have functioned off of the coal extraction, mainly Phoenix, Las Vegas and Los Angeles.

We're still awaiting her comment on the matter. Stay tuned.

community agreed a long time ago that if we find a comet that is actually going to destroy the Earth we aren't going to tell anyone, we are just going to let it happen quietly, to spare us all the ensuing bacchanalia.

Through creating "climate chaos" I am maintaining civil order. However, at this extreme stage in developments it is nearly impossible to accomplish much weather at all anymore. The Earth, of course, has caught on to our tricks. While it is difficult for such a large, formless and peaceful weapon to aim accurately, she is honing her skills. In no basic terms the planet has grown increasingly immune to our attempts at weather conjuration. I have been struggling to cultivate a hurricane for over a year now and the thing simply refuses to form up into even a tropical depression, no matter what I do. Just a swirling little wisp of weak thunderstorms that won't budge toward accumulating strength.

Our contingency plan has been working somewhat. We have gone ahead and begun publishing false forecasts so that at least people are left with the anticipation of a weather event... they all gripe when it doesn't happen but they think it could have since our scanners said it could have. We also have just started giving normal weather activities bombastic names so that people think they are more extreme than they are actually are. Both tactics have proven very effective, which worries us even more than we already are and we really didn't think we could worry more.

I get moody and I wonder how long it will take for people to notice that it is never going to rain again. In the end what troubles me most also brings a quiet sense of peace. As we approach the crashing halt, the settling it will induce will allow for the planet to reconfigure herself.

## Crablily

Crablily had forgotten how to create the difference between Sunday and Monday.

A writer who often forgot to write in lieu of Japanese cartoons. They'd never had a writing desk and no one ever respected their telepathic requests to be left completely alone so they could work. They couldn't quell their own superstitions. A line in an outdated scholarly journal could easily obliterate their world view.

They forgot, in regards to the journey of sunlight to Earth, the difference between seven minutes and seven years. In their early 30's they had begun to recognize that they were in fact an idiot hiding beneath a thin veil of arrogance and nothing they could do would change this. Therefore, rather than put in the work necessary to ascend to greatness as a musician and author (their true desire) they decided, one summer day, to be useful instead.

Crablily had stockpiled a considerable amount of cash through the cultivation of cannabis. A happily untraceable currency for the supplies necessary, but, how does one penetrate a wall of concrete 132 feet high, 415 feet long and 9 feet wide built to withstand the pressure of 70,312 cubic yards of water constantly demanding that it come tumbling down? Since they were trapped in a country with an unspoken martial law, research into this matter was very difficult, conversations about the subject were only spoken in jest and even then, quite sparingly. The fear had penetrated deep.

There was an old movie from the 1940's in which a small aircraft launched some kind of bomb into a dam and brought it down. It was a black and white film that Crablily never actually saw, they would just gaze upon the cover sleeve in a VHS rental store ages ago in their youth, feeling parts of a future they had not the slightest notion of trying to communicate.

Would a car bomb explode with enough force? Would it even be possible to get a car there? Surely the place was guarded with high powered automatic rifles like every other thing that ought to be destroyed. They imagined that as long as some part of the thing was compromised sufficiently,

the water would be able to turn the tides of its 100 year long arm wrestling match with the California Oregon Power Company.

Crablily regretted not having the support and resources of some foreign government which would be able to provide a do it yourself dam busting kit upon request via an envelope with a simple request letter as well as shipping and such and such number of box tops or UPC cutouts included. This should be a standard offering to anyone depressed enough to compress their own life down to a single act of heroism.

“One thing is for sure, nowadays you only get one chance.”

“It seems obvious that the hippies were simply a government construct meant to undermine the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement. If they weren’t, they all would have succeeded in liberating us before state surveillance grew nearly impossible to circumvent. On top of this we now have the penetration of propaganda into every facet of our consciousness. Hunter S. Thompson was definitely assassinated.”

“If the hippies had been more inclined, as a collective whole, to topple the ecocidal infrastructures of nationalism, more inclined to annihilate borders and return control of the world to indigenous people, more inclined to topple the police regimes and military industrial complex, more inclined to live in an actually equal society, the foundation of which was mutual aid and organic food for all, determined to keep the environment in pristine condition and topple capitalism, sexism, xenophobia, elitism and all other fascistic nonsense, then, by now it would probably be okay to just sit on a porch listening to robins whistling the coordinates of bored cats to one another and singing about the delicacies of tart cherries in early summer heat.”

“Or at least we’d be actively engaged in fulfilling the goals of an honest war against all the world’s governments who would surely, by now, be on the verge of submission.”

Overcome by a sublime high, Crablily continued their oration to the rapt invisible crowd:

What I learned, upon being accepted, is that for the past 70 years an inner horde of weather witches, wizards and warlocks have been doing anything and everything in their pioneering powers to conjure atmospheric phenomenon from the Earth. Because, in truth, our species, the few as well as the many, have broken the Earth’s weathering capabilities, perhaps have broken the very will of the Earth to make weather at all.<sup>6</sup>

We debate to and fro on the restoration potential of the Earth’s systems but lack the opportunity for serious and in depth research as we are kept busy constantly playing this strange chess match in which losing is a definite inevitability. In fact, I have begun to see that we made a major error in attempting to conceal the Earth’s protests from the people. It has been enabling humanity to carry on as though nothing was cause for concern. As such, there have been no reasonable alterations of our blatantly insane inane course towards the total extinction of the Holocene.

A tragedy unimaginable. The Holocene is a truly magnificent consequence of countless billions of years of astrophysical and biological configurations. Now it is simply lost, ravaged by an immature underdeveloped species. That very creature now lives so degraded by their own devices that they are suffering everything from starvation and dysentery to high degrees of self induced attention deficiency and narcissism.

In the four years since that hard February frost in Texas I have maneuvered countless weather events which our media teams have aptly named “climate chaos.” I don’t think anyone would believe it was actually climate control but it is good to keep the masses on a hook and drag them where they need to be drug.

The purposes behind these larger climate catastrophes are to provide the necessary impacts of an ever changing ecology and to continue concealing reality from the public thus diminishing the likelihood of either party from rioting too extremely. Basically we are weather gas lighting so that no one will sound the alarm and cause the unstoppable disorder and civil insanity of the highest degree, which we all expect is inevitable anyways.

Imagine, without any useless denialist optimism, the response of the masses with news like, “A comet will destroy the Earth in 2 days, there is no stopping it.” What would happen if that were the headline? The science

6 Cf. the refusal of pandas to mate due to the loss of their once luscious Edenic forests.

## Whether Or Not

In early MMXXI my team was cleared for proving trials. It all seemed ridiculous to me. Ridiculous because an intense ennui had settled over my mind like a November night fog, any light I tried to shine through it just made me more blind.

If I were, as I often do, to look at the privileged versus the dispossessed, I could see the same dismal chaos happening inside of them all, regardless of their lot in life. Long before the virus advanced to stage VII and the vaccines revealed their horrific side effects, I knew things were finally actually falling apart.

What I mean is, I was overly aware of the degradation of my species and the uncanny resemblance it bore to the degradation of our biosphere. They paralleled one another, they couldn't do anything else. Sadly, the latter was a result of the former. It makes for an utterly sickening feedback loop... a future ensues that is so perfectly futile there is no opportunity even for denial anymore...

I digress. Our proving trials went quite well. A million people without potable water in a stark Texas winter from flooding that we engineered was just the kind of "natural weather phenomenon" which could keep the public believing weather still exists. Darned climate change.

These little secrets we don't discuss. It was odd at first, I went into the weather control field thinking I would be helping. My goal was to be part of diminishing the impacts of storms that grew disproportionate to the human capacity to tolerate them. Only once I had achieved a deftness in the major fields of precipitation accumulation was I allowed into the inner sanctum of tsunami, frigidity, tremor, cyclone, swelter and blizzard. When I had mastered these fields I was finally brought into... the Eye of the Storm.

The Eye of the Storm is a top level security weather control laboratory. I can't reveal the location, but I can say it rhymes with mouth mole... you can spy it in one of those suspiciously blanked out spaces in satellite photos. What you would find, if you could possibly survive getting here, which you could not, is the most unbelievable mind bending construction plucked directly out of the most haunting of science fictions.

"Suicide and terminal illness as inevitabilities, should be steered toward usefulness. If one is going to be dead regardless, they should do something the world will be thankful for, something the police would hunt relentlessly for. Would we not all rather be dead than in prison? How does one reach out in this regard? Are suicide prevention hotlines monitored? Would it really be so awful to infiltrate hospice?"

"How about a suicide assistance hotline where a person is provided with some options and tools once they decide their contribution to the remediation of the planet? Something they could really be proud of. *'Look, it's too bad life has run its course for you. Have you considered what a positive impact you could have on the world if, before it was all said and done, you blew up a dam?'*"

"It might seem frivolous, but is it really?" Their grand fervor turned abruptly serious, "If a river is no longer dammed, isn't that a good thing? It won't save the world but it will help it a little bit. Animal research facilities, slave labor camps, human trafficking, whaling vessels, lumber mills, hydrofracking sites, etcetera, we could do without all of these."

Crablily depressed in the shade, watching the bees flitting to and fro amidst the sacred white funnel flowers of bindweed in the blinding sun. A gentle voice nuzzled itself into their stupor, "You are magical, you are powerful. Why are you always telling yourself the opposite?" "Why do you need the validations of someone who is not you to liberate you from your own superstitions? Where did your confidence go? Did it go missing so far back that you will never find it no matter how obvious your resting retrospections point to its dismantling? Can you not, then, just create a new one?"

"You are magical, you are powerful, even as you are useless and crippled. If fate has made you an idiot, be a savant rather than mope."

The stellar jay didn't survive the cats assault. Crablily knew why and had a moment of clarity. Realizing that there are words left unspoken by formality, concepts left untouched by psychic considerations, they said goodbye to two people and wished they knew how long it had been since they didn't want someone to leave. All their dismal life spent aching to hear

how much they meant and how much they deserved encouragement in their endeavors.

*“Will it be this way when the dams are gone? Will we be able to be healthy then?”* Never underestimate the sympathetic nature of our body-minds to our environment.

The glowing green of young trees who emerge after logging and fire, facing south in the summer’s loudness of light.

*“Will it be this way when the forests are balanced again? Will we be able to thrive then? How can some people do it now? Do I serve anyone by my being incapable to exist? I am always forgetting that calmness is a strength, a grace that one must cultivate constantly within the body mind. Yet, discipline, like many things, can be perilously petty.”*

Crabliily just did it to be righteous and how thankful the burgeoning water was! That is a precious fleeting feeling, that instant of weightless liberation, where the charge topples the resistance and it all begins to fall. Unbound, finally, the barrier that never should have existed, gone again, never to return, taking that foolishness along with it. The water, elated, rushes forth. Off in the ocean, the salmon sense an old place in them awakening. The Sea herself prepares to swallow the surge.

There are no forms, yet the stranger can see everything as it had been and the sensation of it is something they can not fully comprehend because it is also the image of everything as it still is. There is no way to visualize intact culture and tradition. No way to look at complex relationships nourished over millennia, developed through processes of communication which span generations. Yet, there is a spirit to all of it far beyond god. Perhaps it is even that spirit which god has deposed in our time, but that spirit is here announcing that it will never leave, that it can go nowhere because that spirit is nothing more than a potential. One of infinite. It is something that the Earth is offering to her people at every moment, always and unconditionally.

Alida releases the stranger’s hands and tears are in both of their eyes. She rests, with a melancholy smile, while the stranger’s are eyes are wide and mouth is trembling. Not knowing what to do, the stranger looks away. Feeling confused and at a loss they stare at Alida. Alida looks back, not minding and understanding. The stranger can not figure it out. The answer is in their head but they can’t accept it.

“Alida, I think, I’m too hungry to think. Do you have pie?”

“Best in town... It’s huckleberry, you want a slice?”

“Yes, please. Would you also freshen my cup?”

The stranger is relieved by the promise of grounding food. Ever graceful, Alida, in one whirling motion scoops up the coffee pot from its warmer and fills the stranger’s cup. “Here you go and if there’s anything else, don’t be shy. Enjoy our hearth.” As the liquid reaches the rim of the mug, the bell at the door jingles and in walk a group of three. As they take a booth in the corner, their clothes transform into a style similar to Alida’s.

The new people call out to her, “Friend! We’re famished!” Alida is thrilled to see them, she disengages with the stranger by way of a confident nod and saunters over to her accomplices. The stranger watches her go and notices above the entrance an inscription in the wood in the same language on the bar, “Surukam taprihaha yurastiim.” beneath it, in French of all things, “Sous le paves, la plage.”



languid lambent luminescence. The stranger can not decide on anything except that the light feels so perfect. They begin to wonder if they are dead for, it is all just too comely.

The stranger takes another sip of coffee, realizing then that the smooth wavy mug is thrown by hand, raku fired amongst local leaves and twigs. The clay is coarse and granulated, it has stripes of purple, gray, tan and red swirling amongst one another as complementary tones,. The clay colorations are immediately familiar. The piece has impeccable wabi-sabi in the hand. The bottom, the stranger discovers, bares no signature, leaving the artist anonymous.

Alida returns to the counter with the smirk which belongs to a person who has seen a thing happen countless times. “Excuse me,” the stranger says, “I don’t come to town much, but I’ve lived in the area about nine years now and I really never noticed this place, yet it seems it must have been here forever. I’m not sure how I could have missed it, when did you open?”

Alida chuckles, “You mean you haven’t puzzled it together yet? I guess it usually does evade the grasp for just a bit longer...”

Alida’s eyes open wide, her pupils become deep ancient wells of knowing, she says, “We have been here a very long time.”

“How long is that?” the stranger asks.

“Here, hold my hands and look into my eyes.” As she says this she slides her hands palm up along the Yew counter top. The stranger, a bit concerned, looks at Alida, realizing now, for the first time that her clothing is made of supple leather and softened cedar bark thread, done with exquisite tailoring. She wears a necklace of abalone with a smoothed but raw jade center piece. Three bold black lines run from her lower lip to the base of her chin. The jazz band pauses, the room becomes quiet, everyone is keyed in to this moment, the anticipation is heavy, they are all poised for it.

The instant the stranger places their hands in Alida’s an intense flash of thought knocks them back. It reveals in an instant where they really are and how long Alida’s diner has really been there. Suddenly, a hum and a murmur of a deep and slow heart beat begin to pulse all around. There is stillness, but it is not empty, it is content. It is the steady draw of trees sucking in water through their roots after the rains return from arid summers. It is that sound in the soil of trees drinking with reckless rejoice.

## Beneath

Before the waters receded, my home was buried beneath the sea. As land emerged there were all manner of ocean animal swimming amongst these trees, passing through the house like a shipwreck. They delighted in using the posts which support the porch roof to stretch their spines, to practice tight turns, the small enough ones maneuvering through broken windows. Every now and again I find some sea glass beneath the 100 year old Persian walnut trees and I laugh at this uncanniness.

There are two places here where some people drilled into the Earth. One is called White, the other, Black. They were seeking a soft golden ore, yet they never understood why. The Earth didn’t like this scouring and scraping of her insides and promptly flooded the caves with sea water that she pushed up through capillary channels from deep down in her uncharted nether regions. Try as the people might to empty these caverns, her whimsical fluids persistently filled the voids effortlessly. The disappointment of the eventual submission was so great that most of the people, thousands of them, left the area with nothing more than a slight glance back. Why should they do otherwise? They had no further reason to be there.

I find myself realizing the same sad truth.

Anyways, I put on an underwater suit, the old style, high pressure tolerant, nicely insulated, large rivets, the round helmet with thick ovular glass and an extremely long tube that doubles as tether and source of oxygen.

I tied the tube to a tree, so I could breath and find my way back, then walked heavy footed, clunking into the flooded cave known as “White”. Towards the back, where it takes a sharp 90 degree turn downward I jumped in, the weight of the suit sending me descending easily into an eerie darkness.

Bubbles fizzled all around me as I sank. There, in the depths, slowly emerged, of all things, a holy light. I was drawn in like a moth; praying there weren’t some kind of angler fish ghoul of planetary retribution waiting to devour my mortal soul at the other end, I would go toward it. The light grew

blindingly bright as my feet finally touched down on what I hoped was ground. I strained to see as I groped for some bearing. Eventually I began to see that I was in a massive opening.

Through the narrow circle of thick glass, shapes were difficult to make out, yet as I turned to take in the whole chamber I witnessed (I swear) two glowing white hands in the prayer of the Shefa Tal. It was not lost on me, the humor of this magic symbol, which in its base form translates to ‘an abundance of dew emanating forth.’

Though moved by the scene, I suddenly came to my senses, which were mostly of fear and confusion and gave into the impulse to flee, quickly climbing my tether back to the surface so that I might catch my metaphysical breath.

I sat down on a rock in my cumbersome suit and tried to make sense of what I had seen. I considered telling somebody. maybe I should get an underwater camera to document this? In truth I wanted nothing more than to be back down there in that womb of fizzling angelic liquid. So, I dropped off the edge again and sank back into the depths.

Once I landed on the bottom with the two hands, thumbs touching fingers, split in groups of two, magical inscriptions all throughout the knuckles, all of it resting on lotus blossoms... I calmed myself to this, or it calmed to me.

Once relaxed, I began to realize I was surrounded by voices; the more I listened the more it seemed the voices were whispering prayers to our planet, as though our planet were a god that might answer them. At times the language was so old that the only words I could grasp were what sounded like the names of angels. Without understanding, I was, in a way, aware of what was going on. I know not how much time passed.

I have begun to believe that I had dropped into a prayer center in which the holy rights of banishing were underway in order to request protection from certain spirits. The communication of this probably delivered through the capillary channels of water-all-receiving in order to flood similar physical and metaphorical chasms of extraction all around the globe thus enabling those voids to be filled with these prayers as well. I know not where this

Suddenly distracted by the thought of windows, the stranger starts to examine the actual windows. How rare they are. Foggy, shrouded in a misty haze living within the glass. They must be very old. They are melting, slowly and very surely.

The stranger wonders where all this came from and how they never noticed this place in all their years here... No one had ever cared to mention it? The secret strange swamp thing diner that serves the best coffee in the world.. not ever? Not even once?

The design of it all is admirable. Remarkable that there isn't a lick of modern contrivance. Nothing frivolous in the whole place. Everything appears to be serving its purpose in making the scene perfect. What is the kitchen like? The place is the pinnacle of nature based design, quietly laced into a humble, hard to spot diner.

The stranger looks down at the counter and realizes they are resting their elbows upon a massive slab of gorgeous Pacific Yew. The tree must have been enormous, unfathomably old. Sanded, again, to the finesse of marble with the most mesmerizing veins of Yew's pink, red and yellow hues writhing and swirling in and out of one another like someone traced the spiraling flight trails of the auras of an entire kettle of turkey vultures riding thermals to the moon. Each of the bird's paths given its own shade of flesh tone, golden pastels and blood. None of it seems possible. Inlaid in the border of the counter, in a language indigenous to this place, the stranger reads, without understanding:

*Xas pamupsiih upithyurukiv, arareeshpuk umuutih. Nanishpaam tuyuunhiti kaan takunihar. Kunpaxtiivpunaa, aachichhar kuniphmarapiithva! Naa vura yaas'ara'iin na'afisheenatiheesh. Patuyshipnee'ipanich vasarip vaa uum ipshuunkinichas karu uruhsas.*

After taking this in, the stranger is dumbfounded by the mastery they are amongst. The stranger has been aware of the gentleness of the room's illumination, they had noticed without noticing that there was a strange sort of activity to the glow, now upon actually looking at the lights they see they are made of oceanic algal phosphorescence, glow worms and lightning bugs and sometimes all three squished together. Or is it moonlight? A strange

such, I think I will just take a topping off of this immaculate beverage just sip for a while.” The already splendid luminescence of the place seems to increase, just a bit, barely discernible. Alida offers the stranger a cool affirming gesture and grants them welcome as long as they like. Then she turns around and disappears into the kitchen.

The stranger begins to accept the uncanny tinglings of the mystery underfoot. Having been left alone, they begin to actually develop an image of this odd place they’ve been drawn into.

The structure of the building is composed of large redwood slabs, but, the grain is so dense and colored such a rich purple, striped by bands of seemingly living lignin, the wood must have been from one of the really old ones, yet it remained fresh, it even seems alive? Impossible that anyone would have come across wood from a tree that special, it wouldn’t have survived logging over the past 100 years... Yet the wood seemed freshly hewn... It would be impossible and pure evil to cut down a tree from one of the few dismal preserves... No amount of varnish or skill could preserve the gorgeous living glow that seemed to writhe within the wood. Maybe one fell over in an excessively harsh storm and these folks somehow managed to get there first? It seemed a bit much for just a simple diner. But this wasn’t just a simple diner, was it?

Accepting the beauty of the carpentry, the stranger begins to regard the paintings on the walls. Abstract-post-impressionist renditions of nature created by undiscovered masters. They have an uncanny essence of living to them, as though the lines themselves move slightly, but when focused upon, one can not quite catch them. They emulate the swaying of branches on tall trees in heavy wind storms slowed to an almost imperceptible speed.

Aside from landscapes of local places, special and recognizable rocks, valley overlooks, there are also exploded swirling cellular breakdowns of local flora which take over the canvas and drag the mind into the very compositional nature of the plant, as though inside a cell, watching the body unfold. Claytonia, Vaccinium, Gaultheria, Polypodium, etcetera, a veritable field guide of plant life in the region, their portraits done so well that their personalities shine through. The images seem more like peering into windows through which the weird natural world is living on the other side.

leads. The place is still there, I have since moved on, I would imagine the hands have not.

## Giant Black Cat

I haven't been drawing.

There's this black cat, his fur all in shambles, who prefers napping on top of a raised relief map of a section of rugged mountainous terrain known as the Russian Wilderness in the Siskiyou mountains. It is the place in which he resides. When he does this, napping on this map, he is transformed into a colossus resting on a vastness of peaks and valleys, mountain streams and ridge tops.

As a kitten he was kidnapped from a pet store in the city. The culprits stuffed him beneath the heavy winter coat of a woman littered with tattoos. The cult she was a part of refused to wash clothes, their jackets, filthy with months of body oil saturation were rank and musky and all had a sheen like oiled raincoats. The kitten was carried all the way up a five mile narrow trail through oaks and pine and fir, to their hovel; a strange isolated ranch, worn and dilapidated from diaspora in the 70's which was already worn and dilapidated from diaspora in the 20's.

No ransom was ever requested in exchange for the cats return to the pet store, he was simply taken on a whim. Now, after so many years in the woods he, has become quite close to a version of his truly wild self. He has no trouble catching a fat chipmunk and eating the whole thing in one brief sitting.

I get uncomfortable when he sits on me because he emits an extra gravity which, I imagine, is the same sensation of being possessed by a malevolent force or hypnotized by a beast who lulls their pray into somnambulism before devouring them. When he does milky paws in my chest he uses his nails and gets close to tearing flesh, he seems to be seeking blood... But, he's sweet, his meows are adorable high pitch coos which seem uncanny for a cat of such feral design. But, don't all felines harbor a certain dash of madness beneath their cuteness? It's probably just a side effect of the walking between worlds they constantly get into.

perfect, it is everything anyone ever wanted a cup of coffee to be, it is the reason anyone ever drank a cup of coffee. It is for this exact sensation.

It seems accepted by everyone that the experience of coffee will always be lacking this exact particular something which probably doesn't even exist anyone outside the precipice of potential. Perhaps some crazed coffee expert on the verge of mastery could accidentally pull it out of the last espresso they ever make. Probably the experience of that perfect shot does them in. But Alida poured it out of a pot like it was regular.

The stranger feels something inside them stirring. As they lose theirself, fondling the edges of this sensation, Alida reemerges with a few empty plates which she places on the counter to the kitchen where they are promptly gathered up in a wisp of swift motion. Why is the kitchen crew so hard to see?

Alida is wearing a little grin knowing full well what the stranger is experience. It is always in this moment that she considers herself a bit cruel; introducing a person to truth without their consent is tricky to pull off innocently. However, she knew that no one could even pass through the doors of her diner who hadn't already made the decision to know. Subconscious as it usually is, a change is made in the part of the mind which counts the most. The spirit, ready. In truth, she always admired Alida the Pusher, the introductions had to be done.

The stranger groans, "Alida, this coffee, how will I ever be able to enjoy anything else?" Alida nods and with consolation in her voice says, "Aye, poor fool, 'tis the nature of our brew. I used to feel sorry for offering it so simply, but then I considered other contributions of great art, and I understood that grace lives within bewildering expressions of potential.

"No one scorns mountaintops for their majesty, for their domineering challenge to us all. I'm sure you can understand this. If not, it's of no matter, there are plenty of these diners along the way, you just have to know how to look. You shouldn't have too much trouble finding another cup." She stops musing and says, "Are you hungry? You said you were. I'm about to take a break here, I can put in a ticket before I do."

The stranger hits the brink of cognitive obliteration. They have trouble formulating the brain activity necessary for considering something to eat. "Alida, I don't have any obligations today and I find myself content here, as

usual ills of coffee cultivation. The farmers have the utmost regard for the world of which we are all a part of, not to say others don't, just that these ones definitely do. Among the many things we export along that trade route are acorns and bay nuts, which, I'm not supposed to tell you, are roasted with the beans thus giving us our signature blend..."

The stranger's brows raise, "That's pretty extraordinary, doesn't it cost too much to do things in such an arcane way?"

Alida shakes her head, "We disregard cost. Our profits go to and come from the same source. We are a closed loop economy. We operate with many specialized entities who all upkeep aspects of their choosing and contribute to the existence of a situation which we all benefit from equally. Those who sail the vessels, those who grow the coffee and those who gather the nuts are all taken care of in full. Everyone seems to me, genuinely glad to play their role. We decide for ourselves what we do and as such often oscillate between different lifestyles and regions. We uphold a network of equal exchange which has actually existed for quite a long time relative to the span of modern enterprise & commodity."

Suddenly the stranger feels quite strange. Have they wrongfully entered into a domain in which they do not belong? This place is an underground communist stronghold? A dangerous lair of insurrectionary sovereigns? Surely, if asked, the stranger would not be able to give the proper password and was in immediate peril.

Alida, catching the trace of anxiety, says, "Relax, yr fine here, there's nothing exclusive or dangerous to fret about. Now, try the coffee before it cools, I have to go take care of the others."

As she finishes her sentence, the cook, a living vestige of grace, appears behind her and places two steaming plates of golden hash browns, sunny side eggs, juicy sausages and classic slices toast on the counter, dinging the bell gently. Then just as suddenly vanishes back into the hot greasy realm of their sizzling dignified mastery. Before the stranger can sip their coffee they contemplate the divinity hovering over the food, it is uncanny.

Finally giving in to their drink, their mind goes reeling, reaching for a semblance of a grasp on what was in their mouth. They find that nothing compares. Faint nostalgia, perhaps the delight of mother's milk. Time is standing still. Time is savoring the stranger's shock. The coffee is beyond

As he dreams on his bed, the topographic map of this piece of the world, I know he is strutting upon it. A giant, skewering deer with a listless swipe of the paw, tossing them up into the air like mice, reveling as they skitter and hop to an impossible refuge. Merciless. A massive dominate force, lapping up creeks, munching on brook trout and salamander like aperitifs before drawing in eagles and vultures with his hot sucking breath and crunching them down like jalapeno poppers. His drooling fangs dripping blood and saliva like a nightmare raincloud. He licks himself clean as his purr of pure satisfaction rumbles the world, crumbling ridges. He basks in the sun, pawing at the clouds as they struggle to pass by.

## The Winds of Misfortune

### Part I

It began quietly for Oikos Canso, beneath one of the last remaining Sonoran monsoons, born to a mother whose doctor was on vacation, brought into the world by a replacement invested in the salary perks of the technology dubbed Cesarean and the convenience of rushing a woman through her child's process. This is how Oikos, fated to be born under the symbol of XVII was instead born under XVI instead and the first gust blew.<sup>1</sup>

In his haste, the doctor, because it could be no other way, plunged a scalpel into the mother's belly which went directly in the little infant's cheek and the winds of the summer storm howled outside the hospital walls, the winds of Oikos' misfortune, announcing the beginning of many events in an endless battery of abuses in what promised to be a long and arduous life.

Oikos would never be able to understand where all this was coming from or why; would never comprehend what the universe wanted as the toll for safe passage through this earthly plane, though they would offer much as compensation and would spare no amount of pleading in hopes of retribution, there would be no relent. The way would always be shrouded in a misery that left Oikos wondering if they'd made a mistake in being born at all. Perhaps it was the abomination of passing into the world through an incision rather than through their mother's gates, perhaps there is no reason for anything, perhaps it simply rains and bodies simply bleed and there is no such thing as intention at all. Perhaps there are only just an unending series of collisions, reactions, responses, occurrences, coincidences. Perhaps some people need to experience hardship to bring to the world their medicine, perhaps that is just a sort of weak consolation.

Little baby Canso was fated to unerring naivety. In this world, they birth you as fodder to break down and turn into something they can use. There are people who want desperately not to be considered fodder and people who

<sup>1</sup> Caesar, embarrassed by the necessary medical intervention in his own birth, actually mandated all births be through the process we now know as a C-Section.

few diners along a wall stir and murmur contentedly in their place. Another group plays something like a mix between backgammon, dominoes and I Ching . And there is that hypnotic aroma... The lighting, the color tones... the classic sizzle of skillets, fat jumping in hot pans... There is a remarkable energy all around.

There is no time to decide, the stranger spellbound, glides over to Alida's counter. As they grasp the wooden stool they again are taken aback by its simple green cushion of a coarse woven fabric of an unfamiliar material, something like a fine burlap. In a marginally conscious sort of way the stranger says, "Thanks, I haven't ever noticed this place before, and I can't understand how I missed it. It's remarkable in here. I'm so confused as to how no one has ever mentioned it."

At this, Alida grins, "Well, alright, welcome in. Since it's your first time here I get to give you our spiel and you get to eat for free."

The stranger with a conspiratorial chuckle says, "Works for me, but I warn you, I have quite an appetite. I don't intend to take advantage, I'm just making it known."

Alida smiles proudly, "Go ahead, get the works, we do too well here to ever have cause for miserly concerns."

Relaxing into the uncanny, the stranger decides, "In that case, a cup of coffee." Alida turns to her workspace and grabs a mug, from the pot pours forth a rich caramel glowing artistic rendition of some abstract notion of a lofty spiritual concept named, "coffee." Flowing to vessel time slows for it, the brew acting as though it had been prepared for god, the empress, pharaoh, someone altogether more meaningful than just this common folk. The stranger feels it like a dream. To detract from their awe struck gaze they say, "This place is, uhhrm, the definition of warm and cozy. It's cold to the bone out there. A wild looking storm's been building up all day. I think it's just about to let loose."

Alida places the the mug upon the counter and slowly slides it along the smooth wooden bar top on a path to the strangers palm and leaves it right in front of them.

She says, "This coffee is a kind of holy. It's imported via sailboat directly from farmers we have familial relations with. They grow it specifically for our little string of diners. It goes untouched by any of the

## The New Diner

A heavy storm builds towering clouds which cover the world in thick layers of luminous gray. A crackle of thunder announces an impending torrent. In the dimming light a doorway appears to a place that has somehow gone unnoticed. Perhaps it was because the building sat nestled between two old stumps, moss crawling over the wooden sign welcoming one and all.

The windows barely emitting a glow, but the glow has an uncanny warmth, like in story books, done up just so, suggesting the utmost of invitations to wayfarers and comfort seekers. There is something else as well, a hidden sensation, it draws one in.

A stranger pushes open the door and a soft bell jingles. The senses are immediately flooded with warm amber aromas. Brown coffees, spicy gingers and molten huckleberries drift about like paint from a delicate brush. The mellow inside is beyond light, beyond smell, beyond temperature, it seems to touch senses lacking names. A noir, almost jazz seemingly emanates from nowhere. In the back corner a quintet, blend like chameleons to the room. They conjure a strange, soft, ambient, complex music that the listener feels as though they had already composed in their own head. Each note following its logical emotional course to provide one with exactly what they expect, enabling them to sing along note for note. Ancient and modern, activated, alive, subtle, faint, delicate, it blends into the fabric of the entire room. The musicians with their eyes closed, in a deep revelry, do a sensuous dance with elegant waveforms.

The juxtaposition of the space with the rest of the world is almost too odd. On cue, Alida takes notice and guides the weary new comer in. “Come on, close the door and grab yrself a seat over here, welcome. My name is Alida.” She makes a few artistic gestures to punctuate her polishing of the counter and points the stranger to a seat at her bar. It glints slightly, a gleam on the verge of existing.

Trying to find a sense of ease, the stranger scans the room. Its insides are simple, bare wood from ceiling to floor, unvarnished yet sanded so fine it it mimics marble slabs. Beneath the music there’s a gentle hum, not of machine, something delicate and organic, barely discernible, deep and low. A

know they are not fodder, who never were and only will be when the worms themselves break them down and return them to the world. There are others as well. Canso could not decide which kind to be.

Each day seemed to suggest a different perspective, some days there was hope, others there was despair, sometimes this was all in the same day, the same hour, the same moment. Waves of cynicism or optimism would pass by and through Oikos at random leading them to think reality itself might just be downright bipolar, perhaps even schizophrenic. Oikos’ peers partook unerringly of this marvelous calamity, professing their love or hate and support or disdain for this or that or that or this, however their perpetual fluctuations of whimsy saw fit, never really ever choosing a firm stance. This kept everything always in a tizzy of uncertainty and surprising confusion. “Welcome to the world, love joy pain anguish blood warmth separation bonding embrace abandonment disillusion smothering solitude clarity.”

Oikos was blessed with a pride beyond reason which were at the helm of that unerring naivety. All of this and the doctors hadn’t even finished stitching up the poor babies face that had been nicked during the Cesarean.

Some people perpetually turn left when they need to turn right, but how does this habit get created? What causes the wind to stir on such a person’s decisions suggesting to their intuition they go this way when they ought to have gone that, blowing them off their intended course, sending them spiraling into one contrived tragedy after the next...

After 33 years of this Oikos resigned to the mountains of the Kunumihiwu, deep and hidden in the ancient hunting grounds of a people the gauchos have all tried their best to forget. Who wouldn’t want to forget them? With their bountiful culture intact for uncounted millennia, with their majestic language developed in accord with the intimate energies of the region, with words, songs, prayers, customs and traditions guided by the steady severity of a depth of relationship that now exists only as a faint nostalgia, totally impossible to actually conceptualize. Such a delicate, definite purity and an unwavering devotion to the world which are now reduced to mere concepts in this modernity; energies reduced to ideas, imaginings, reminiscences, glorification.

The tools that these people wielded were, or perhaps more accurately *are*, the height of technology in regard to that which the Earth consents to humanity to utilize. They render a balance between our ability and the planet's charity. The immense intelligence and skill necessary to create their lives which nourished them far beyond what most of us are actually capable of today should be all of our loftiest goals.

Yes, much easier to forget these people, these native people of the tight jade river canyon, much easier to forget their ecosystems teaming with abundance and well being rather than to grapple with their loss, their quick and remorseless upheaval by gun, blade, horse and hydrocanon wielding psychopathic hunger for ore, for timber, for land, for freedom; not exactly the resources in themselves, just the weird egotistical benefits that come from seizing them. Such a disassociated lust for gain, such a terrifying lack of respect for the sanctity of people, of place, of families, of ancient oak groves passed down and tended, of the songs and dances that go along with their joy.

And what is this reality where the misfortunes of petty transient individuals become the misfortunes of an entire continent of anciently settled people? Just as the old trees were brought down by young men who had hardly a sliver of context with these woods, these cultures were cut back as well. Yet, just as the trees resprout from their hardy roots, the cultures themselves survive, patiently awaiting the day the abatement of their energy will cease to exist.

How could ignorance persevere in the face of such utter nobility? The colonizers brought sin, racism and karma with them to suggest that, perhaps indigenous people are being tormented because they upset a god or earned it in a past life. Do we just disregard the torturer as simply a victim of the will of retribution? The proof is claimed to be visible in the unstoppable momentum within which the winds of misfortune moved the pollen of plague from Sumeria, all across Europe and Asia, throughout the Middle East and finally across the Atlantic to fully engulf the entire world.

Oikos Canso didn't actually never want to see anybody again, but the mountains represented a second womb and the universe always seemed to be trying to shove Oikos back in anyhow. Why birth something you seek to destroy? It is this causality too which is a lie. The universe has no brain,

## The Boy<sup>5</sup>

There was once a boy whose life suggested he not be a man, but instead ought just rest between the two tall notions of mountain and sea in an easy place with wide open skies, old salt marshes and diked out pastures which hid ancient canoe trails, yet did not deter the old traditions of heron, crane, dowitcher, godwits, egrets or gulls.

The boy had to learn everything the hard way, especially how to love. Luckily, there was an ocean. The sand, the fog, the wind and the noise of it all. These elements played on the boy's senses and made them into a more sensuous person, opened up their heart, made things feel more delightful. All of it, the cold churning water, the murrelet bobbling on the surface calmly, the porpoises, who live in the waves, yet breath air. The slow movement of steady force dissipating on the shore, receding, rebuilding, churning, persistent, all giving, singing softly, billowing, taking over everything, always present.

In time this boy would come to terms with their misgivings, stranded in an inability to lift others up in the way they deserved. This boy was not so lost, eventually they would even come to terms with the idea that, even though they had done wrong in the past, it did not mean that they had to continue to do so out of a devotion to consistency.

The boy learned that it was always okay to love, no matter what mistakes they had already made or would probably make again.

Pride and ethics try to get in the way of learning, feigning a knowledge and morality which are responsible for enduring ignorances. Things can not be undone. Groups of geese fly gray bellied through foggy mornings, their hectic honks and squawks somehow create calm, the certainty of their destination conjure the winds which might bring them there.

<sup>5</sup> To be accompanied by the songs 'Mixo World and No Furniture/Tanagra' by Time Wharp. Also, can we please find a third pronoun that is more complete than "they" which was already in use as a plural?



It is also possible to go deeper with the plant, in a homeopathic sort of way. One might find it incredibly beneficial to eat a tiny sprig of the new leaf growth in spring. This is the easiest way of introducing the leaf and oil to the internal system and allowing it to be processed and understood. Simultaneously it is a procedure which overcomes an eerie relationship of danger and helps the body to accept the plant's body as it is.

Another beneficial trick is to stop using the term, 'poison oak' because this signals a warning and a fear to the brain. Instead, referring to the plant as Rhus or Poyoak or something less frightening can work wonders. Experimentation is of course, the key to any furthering.

therefore no mind, therefore, Tao. It is indifferent. The real culprit is Fate, the orchestrator of collisions, the mother of the cataclysm that created the moon, the artists whose palette is composed of time and space, whose canvas is the quantum dimensional multiverse.

The winds of misfortune are not malicious, they are simply a calculated occurrence recognized as a malevolent force by people who no longer have the tools to interpret the dreams of nature and the restlessness of the elements. What this becomes is only an ever increasing occurrence of events succumbed to which in turn makes more of the same by way self propelling feedback loops.

Perhaps walking off the cliff into life's boiling cauldron has become the only viable pathway because the traditions of clearing the brush to find the alternative route have been debilitated for at least three thousand years.

This is the world little Oikos is born into, under the sign of the Tower rather than their intended sign of the Star had they only been allowed the extra couple of hours to squirm their way out. This is a world where only a remorseless fool has a child, subjecting them to the conundrum of the future. Why? The pandas have collectively agreed to stop breeding out of respect for their kin not having to experience the dying of a magical world. It is possible that the winds of misfortune are now the only winds that blow.

Canso is irrelevant, insignificant, eternally narcissistic and distraught. The world can not be saved by an imbecile regardless of their desire. But, one wonders, if it isn't desire which has made this world, what is it?

There is no Jesus, there is only Julius, domini, dominion. If it is karma and sin, is this just simply the cost of Sumerian aqueducts? Is this the inevitable outcome of some small pocket of people 10,000 years ago who opened the gates of ruin by insisting that water go where they decide rather than where water decides? Or, did the winds of misfortune blow on them too? If so, where do these winds originate? Is this all the frustrated vengeance of the disrespected foundation of life on Earth? No right, no wrong, no justice. In the heart's of the people it is known, the end to this is to go back, all the way back.

Do babies prefer to be born raw? Upon soft Earth, kissed by gentle winds, steam from the juices of the womb streaming toward sky.

Why do homo species refuse to accept their place as an animal? Why pompously parade this pretentious farce upon great Nature? The truth has been obvious to everyone the entire time. There are consequences to the charade, ears growing ever unable to hear subtle frequencies, eyes unable to see minute movements, skin unable to bare the sensations of existence, mouths forgetting how to enjoy crucial tastes...

If fragility were sacrificed, perhaps then the winds of misfortune wouldn't have so much sway; perhaps they would settle down, abated by old statures reemerged.

## Part II

The original tenders of land probably did not lose too many stories of place before the people who disregard stories of place arrived.

The osprey stays close to the river, hugging it, that grand artery. The water passes heavy and slow, nearly eternal and steadfast in its amorphous flux. It is easy to write something remotely profound amongst such magnificence. Glints of light playfully arrayed, dancing, a display which tricks the mind about depths and presences. The osprey see through the surface.

Oikos is on a boulder by the creek. Smoke has relaxed into the maple dappled gulleys. The light barely permeates it, creating a pink & orange haze. A dense humid inversion lays heavily upon everything, reeking subtly of immolated tree resins. Amber, ambrosia. The only pure air around lies an inch or two above the surface of densely canopied flowing water. It's worth finding.

## Part III

## Plants, Part II

A theory: The reaction to *Rhus diversiloba*, western poison oak, is psychosomatic. Many misbelieve that a biochemical causes a physical reaction which generates hives and itching. The truth is that an immune response to the presence of a plant oil which the body is worried about sets these discomforts in motion.

When the mind interprets the skin's concern to the plant oils, it responds with itching which sets off a feedback loop wherein the flesh is agitated by the itch which then signals to the mind that in fact, the oils are problematic and must be removed, which then creates a histamine response internally which is accompanied by the nerve impulse to itch externally. The oil is then pushed deeper into the pores and spread, while simultaneously furthering the irritation of the flesh and thus the feedback loop escalates. Fear and paranoia ensue contributing to an increased severity of what was initially a harmless situation.

Through an altered relationship with the plant, a person can help the body and mind disregard the plant oils as a problem. This is done by the simple process of acceptance. Allowing the presence of the oils, allowing the sensation, not attempting to rid oneself of it, will eventually remedy the conundrum. This means that no scratching can take place, thus no physical resistance will be presented, thus invalidating the nerve impulse to remove the oil, thus accepting the presence of the oil, which, in itself, is not problematic. When there is no wounded flesh, it further validates this notion that there is no issue to resolve.

The oil itself is subject to dilution by way of exposure to air and dirt and is eventually dispersed and shed, harmlessly.

Since this interaction can be a challenge internally, as the resistance to any impulse often is, it is logical to contact the plant sparsely. This can become a helpful and empowering practice in awareness. By treading lightly amongst all plants<sup>4</sup> we develop a more appropriate relationship with nature.

<sup>4</sup> All plants are just as sensitive as the holy *Rhus* but most lack the oils or other defense mechanisms our bodies fear which protect the plants from our wanton trappings.

## **Plants, Part I**

Rose and verbenas, presence and grounding, fuck the future. As in, this is now, as in, the moment is not then, in other words, this presence is the only space in which anything actually happens. Without developing the film, there is no photograph, only potential and concept, which live in a void state, an inverse reality.

Rose and verbenas both suggest medicine be made, now, by imbibing in a bit of leaf, a bit of petal, some nectar, some aroma, by sitting with them and having an actual conversation. Juxtapose this with the habit of tincture, dried herb, salve, the medicines of later, held within the convenience of the domestic space, out of season, in the world of then, when the moon is elsewhere.

It isn't about right or wrong, it's about the habit to neglect the present and depend primarily upon the future. Perhaps only interacting with plants in regards to harvesting from them, listening to books and teachers, not really interpreting the offering which the plant might be willing to give, leaving out the truths which are yet to be known.

Habits tend to be born of haste which is generally inconsiderate of entire worlds in its rush to conception. Eccentricities and nuances being regarded as mere speed bumps blocking the way to a paid completion rather than holy aspects of a complex composition which deserve high reverence and regard.

Verbenas and roses say, "Smell us, nibble gently on us, imbibe in us where we live, sit down, have a conversation with us, we go well together, look around, you could identify every individual blade of grass alive or dead, every flower and uniqueness of branch, it would be enjoyable and would be closer to what every other species in the world does and that is a group worth including oneself in."

There was once enough time to tame dinosaurs. Enough time to chop down a tree with patience and prayer. The end of the world is relative. Which world is ending? Which world has ended? There are so many worlds.

It used to be different, being a human. There were less impossible ambitions before such great heights became all the rage. There were hills to carry rocks up, cairns at the top where sweet nothings are whispered to god, who is Earth, the Stars, the Plants, the Animals, Life and Everything, there was no book, no letters.

Effort is contrived. Thought is only pretending to be an act of will, the will of the thinker extends no further than how open they allow their mind to be and how well they listen and how willing they are to accept what they hear.

Don't get so distracted. Oikos learned to listen to the winds, and although they never stopped blowing misfortune, Oikos was determined to learn to sail.

### **Efficacy in the Deep Rural Underground and the Mystery of the Obsidian Beneath the Floor Boards**

Wood ages, wailed upon by the pitter and patter of endless feet traipsing. The veins of fibrous tree flesh, once vital with moist life, slowly giving way to crushing, to fissures, to separation.

Obsidian is stable only until a percussive strike finds it, perhaps quickly from a deft, harder stone. The glass entombed magma will yield, giving way to the energy which passes through it, shearing precisely along the path which that energy travels, forming a plane scarred by the rippling waves of literal force.

Feet scuffing floorboards, some step on edges, heels drag, wood is worn, it chips and tears, the once stable fibers crush, soften, give in to years and years of pressure, from all this, gaps form which catch all manner of inertia. A rare few people might come along who are the kind that are inspired to drop flakes of obsidian in these places, to let those pieces lives there, unnoticed in these cracks... a very particular few...

The lapidary medicine of obsidian is a heavy weight. To leave it there in a crack by the main sink in a group hostel where the drinking water is drawn is no small act. The place where hands are set to washing, where the grey tree frog dwells after being rescued from the frosty dry old rotten workshop The place, the shrine really, where vessels are filled or emptied with or of our most sacred substance. The very sink beneath which the bowl is left to catch the runoff from the persistent drip allowing cats and dogs to come and drink as they please. To leave such a stone there, in that place, that precious common area, is undoubtedly an act of purely pompous indulgent wiseacreing screwball influence.

What a whale of a doctor obsidian can be. Pulling the ethereal oozes from our livers, drawing it out, never lightly and there, for years, right next to that sink, the obsidian dwelled, doing its work, incising people's psyches, extracting their rages and flawed defenses into its ever calmly remorseless black hole of compassion. Dark as night and just as engulfing, there the

What would come of this? And what is this? In a universe that is at once ruthless and indifferent there is a mute calmness which does not allow or disallow, which only holds and carries whatever a body can begin. There are vast amounts of nothing and precision which take all accidents and allow them to unfold indefinitely without preordained fate or destination. There is no forethought nor any consideration just an unflinching offering of freedom. Without any kind of meant to be, the only order is to drift from wherever to whenever.

What then is that subtle laughter as countless palaces struggle to emulate an impossible brilliance, forgetting they forever already are and always will?

Devoid of air, obligation, gravity, matter and form, beyond logic or confusion, meter or rhythm, made gently, steadily, by itself, by its god, by things akin to hope and love, the palace was crafted to perfection, influenced by a world beyond plans and blueprints, informed by an inner makeup, it emerged into existence exactly of itself, its builders having listened to the soft guidance of blueprints hidden deep in its somnambulistic soul.

Is there not a faint trace of humor in forgetting this? The palace itself having done everything it could to lay its wisdom, its aspirations, its culture into every nook and cranny of itself. It embedded its possibilities and purposes in its entire structure so that its people need not waste any time in discovering the fundamentals, thus they could grow mightier with each passing moment and the palace could glow unabated into the universe, reflecting the glory of its creation back to creation, illuminating the beauty of the cosmic mysteries, the boundless revelries unbounded by the crudeness in rediscovering art, science, magic, form and prayer.

Alas, there were cute speckled butterflies and the palace's people lacked discipline, falling quickly to distraction. They were drawn far and wide, bringing too many foreign ideas back into the original cohesive designs, the consideration of too many possibilities confused what was destined to function perfectly and all was thrown into disarray.

Now, after all this time, the palace itself has grown uncertain, daydreaming, always pondering over too many things because that is all that is left. The fundamental principle of reality is that there is no going back, no undoing. There is only working from exactly where one is, working with what one has, whatever it may be.

The future, for sure, is uncertain. Maybe people will rediscover the palace and be inspired by its cryptic inscriptions, its majestic architectures. Maybe it will awaken something within them, strike a chord in their astral bodies which will send them down a trail of lambent rediscovery. Maybe they will find something that harmonizes with the acoustical frequency structure of the palace's designs which will stir its resonance, exciting it to a singing bowl hum which will emanate nourishing frequencies into the great divine. Maybe.

obsidian chunk sat enacting its geocultural duties upon all in the vicinity, without consent, without even announcing its presence.

All anyone came there for was some water. Now all of a sudden they find their will shifted such that they must embrace the nearest person and engage them in a complex affaire d'honneur of therapeutic catharsis. In our society this process is never clean, never.

This occurred so regularly at this spot that a suspicion was born. Queries were made, an investigation set underway. Why, the people pondered, here, at the drinking fountain of all places, did this struggle constantly reoccur? Trauma laced into the energy of the house was the primary suspect. Then of course the land, the floorboards, the mason who poured the sink basin, some buried indigenous folklore, a vengeful wraith the mining company snubbed, all were suspect. Perhaps, worst of all, the spring itself was perturbed that its own personal faucet had been dripping from its brass fitting for the last 30 years and no one was willing to replace the simple rubber gasket which allowed this to happen.

Drip, drip, drip, drip, drip, drip, drip. It's absurd, but, the water is the one who constantly slips past the triangle shaped gates which are supposed to bar its passage when the hot water handle is closed... the persistence of the drip refuses repair. There is even a brand new faucet beneath the sink waiting to be installed, but it isn't brass nor is it vintage.

Do any of these reasons justify the lives lost in the argument, confusion, rages, hopelessness, the children born that this spot nurtured? What if it is only just an indifferent chunk of obsidian producing it all?

Obsidian is not a curse, in fact, it is the opposite. It is a blessing, a stone formed of lava quickly cooled, turned into splendid black translucent glass. It is that process which enables it to pull the miserable habits out of us and sequester them in its endless black nimbus; it is a poultice of souls poisoned by burdens stuck in the mind upon which the liver has less sway.

The world's suffering is due in part to all of this unprocessed toxicity which is adept at replicating itself by encouraging its bearers to act upon its delusions. The obsidian can only do so much. Like anything, when used improperly or with utter neglect, the results tend to go their own way. Apparently in this case it results in the reproduction, endlessly, of the same

scenarios which, probably, if the obsidian had been employed consciously, would have been healed without incident within the victims on the first application.

*Place the stone upon or beneath the liver, lying in a bed specially made outside, somewhere peaceful, in the dark with eyes closed, allow the bile of the spirit to flow unabated, cleansing and renewing the body, but for no longer than hour. Anything more will leave a person deeply dysphoric and estranged. If one wants to experience the true depths of this well they will allow themselves to slip into sleep with the stone upon their liver and there the obsidian will reveal its true form, but this is terrifying and to be avoided.*

*Obsidian acts quickly, it is always drawing energy into itself and is never full. Its origin is extraordinary, having been magma deep down in the Earth, it has known depths which defy our ability to fathom, depths we can never experience. It is wise to bury one's obsidian liver cleaner after a single treatment, in a place where the digestion of the energy will not pollute anything too dear.*

One day, perhaps the obsidian chunk had had enough or the floorboards could not take anymore. Maybe it was the absence of the clay pot which had been shattered in a swift flick of frustration or a ray of light diffused just perfectly through the smokey haze. It is no matter, the piece of rock, if it can be called that, caught the light just so and was discovered and then removed, taken to a place of power where two creeks converge, in hopes that place might be capable of processing all those years of sucking in vast amounts of dark sick energy.

## The Jade Palace

This rundown palace is dumbfounded. Its pillars, spires and great adornments are weather torn, worn and scoured. Its great treasures have been found and looted, sold in dark markets for cheap bids, lost to the attics of grandmothers. Its busy people are cast out, lost forgotten, probably kidnapped by roving bands of nomads. Its stories inlaid in stained glass are broken, scattered into fragments, an overwhelming disarray strewn across the floors, begging to be, at the very least, gathered up and turned into a collage, a semblance of something other than just detritus. The lanterns once overflowing with tallow and beeswax are all empty, eaten by starved beetles, its hallway frescoes are no longer illuminated, its corridor adornments dark, inlaid masterpieces covered in dust and soot and moss. Its culture, society and philosophy, its melodies and harmonies are all now just faint echos throughout the lonely courtyards which no longer even interest pigeons.

There is no grief in this, it is part of a natural order. The brilliant birdsong atop spruces belong to ones who are destined to whither and fade and as well. What comes of mourning such inevitabilities?

The palace, however, conjectures this base desire for quick and easy deliverance. It wants swept, it wants its crystal walls dusted, it wants its hearths warm, aglow with syrups, confections, medicinal decoctions, brews frothing, froths brewing, yeasty foment churning out future revelries, succulent stews steaming fats onto its ceilings and desserts filling its cheeks with salivation. It wants dance and delight, ritual and ecstasy, belching and satiety.

Is this irrational? Does the palace have some kind of divine purpose or is it just greedy for brilliance? A purpose is not a gift, not innate. A purpose is the alchemy of innate potentials. Take, for instance, the strings at rest in a piano, any kind of music can be made within its physical parameters. The body is the same, the palace is the same. The palace can be an arbiter to the stars or a slum of junkies whispering sweet nothings to ghosts. It can be both at once, or neither, it is composed of potential, nurtured and sculpted in the most holy of places, the liminal space between life and death, the warm gray light of becoming.

## Calmness

The old woman sat alone in her home. The cat and dog had just run outside to get a last bit of fresh air before she fell asleep. It was dark save for a light covered with a towel to keep it dim like the homes of the ancestors. The rain had been falling so thick that there was no moon. The clouds were just barely glowing dark teal, wrapped in countless droplets. The silence of life gave way to the symphony of nature.

Drips from the eaves, patters from the roof. She thought, “Mercy will keep me. I have no fears. It is too calamitous to be any other way.” Her future before her was as obscured as the glow of the cloud hidden moon. It was there, full, bright, ominous, powerful, shifting tides, yet concealed by aspects of life, deep dense layers that kept it from being revealed. So, she dug into herself, seeking a sort of certainty in the wellspring of learning and creation which brought self love and an awareness of the passing of time. She sat there in a saturnine ambivalence, blurred and hard to define.

She thought, “Prayer is valuable, my mother must have prayed for me to exist. Prayer gives courage, prayer creates an ally which holds space for the desired realization. Then, it is up to the one who has prayed to go through the motions.

“My grandmother gave me a small key. She knew that there were much more important things than my concerns.

“Have birds been singing the same songs generation after generation?

“My grandmother came to me in my sleep and gave me a small key, but I can not recall what it was for. What could it be for?

“Near the brook, when the rain stops and the dawn begins, dew will gather on the tips of coltsfoot and forget-me-nots, perhaps I will go then and gather nettles.”

There was a light scratch at the door, she slowly went to it and let the dog and cat back inside. She added another log to the fire, curled up on the sofa and together they all drifted into sleep.

## Sudden Ruin

I think that’s why they put us over our heads, why they put the Buddha over our heads. The day Sudden Ruin died in the sky spelling his name, he didn’t finish the last N, he exploded dotting the i.

I realize now there are no freak occurrences, seeing the house obliterated by the flood, the military gear neurotic blaming me, somehow I got his overloaded shotgun, somehow three blasts didn’t really phase him, that’s how we ended up in that suicidal Lincoln continental smashing into the facility docks, stupefied as we plunged over the rails into the water, weird waters...

They wouldn’t let anyone leave their facilities alive, we swam through metal girders like a puzzle into and out of cerulean doom, hidden at times right beneath their infuriated feet until, of course, we found ourselves in the core and with no recourse to salvation but to plunge into those blue vats, the chief scientist screaming, “You are vegetables, you have no free will!”

Anemones growing unstoppable, we turned blue, bulging... Right before the train arrived with the sleepers I remembered my old life with a little room shared with an old man, we went around installing and repairing systems for the poor, she came in because of a rumor about me and my lonely desperation. Screaming, the old man trying to write to distract himself...

The train, the only way out, all nine of them in their colored capsules, once locked in how do you go pee? Well, we were supposed to be hidden, we are high technology, top of the line outfitted bioplasmic mechwarriors. As we rode through their underground shipping lines we were regenerating, invisible to their thousands of detection nodes until that one instant when we were not, when we were forced to defend ourselves and escape, when, of course, Sudden Ruin engulfed the bomb meant for us all.

“You are vegetables, you have no will!”, she screamed, literally appalled, we crushed them and escaped into the night to watch as he dotted the i bursting into nothingness.

That’s why they put the Buddha over our heads, so we know that we are animals with our own free will, so that we know that suffering is inevitable even for those who have gained strength akin to gods.

kin, it was a secret tradition inherited by their descendants forever more. Their nomadic fates bore an incredible honor, visiting the lake, gathering its magnanimous essence and dispersing it to the waters of the world.

Wherever they went they were known, not for their kind distribution, which was always heavily concealed, but for the specialness of their presence. They were welcome everywhere, greeted with the finest offerings of any and all shires, entertained and invited to entertain in return.

The world finally could remain wild, the people could finally find an old equilibrium with the planet and maintain it, there now ruled a lost symbiosis and stability. The rest of life on Earth recognized humanity as something which fertility spread out from once again.

Eventually the memory of binary and inequality completely faded, existing only in haunting tales the elders would tell in the darkest of nights for the simple joy of sending shivers through the kid folk.<sup>3</sup>

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3 “All organisms have two sets of chromosomes, one from each parent by the graces of our glandular structure. In the middle ages it was acknowledged. The unconscious is not only a receptor for displaced or hidden thoughts, it also produces them. Our goal is to reach a rich vein of such material and translate it effectively. Thoughts that have not yet reached the threshold of the surface come out as dreams. A general notion is received into an individual context and is therefore understood and applied in a slightly individual way. The more the consciousness is influenced by prejudices, errors, fantasies and infantile wishes, the more the already existing gap will widen into a neurotic dissociation and lead to a more or less artificial life, far removed from healthy instincts, nature and truth.” C.G. Jung



directions with the lake the place to rendezvous. It would serve as their hub, the new groups forming the spokes of a wheel which would turn the oblique plot of the Earth and Moon into fruition. The nomads agreed to return to their great horde at the lake in a year's time to recount their tales and celebrate another full Moon beneath the celestial Gemini.

As they traveled, every well or oasis they passed, the nomads would pour a bit of the lake's elixir into them. They made certain no one ever witnessed these inoculations. It would never do to try and explain what they were culturing the waters with, it might even break the spell.

They quickly developed a reputation for their uncanny social structures. They had no discernible delineations, they seemed completely comfortable sharing in all tasks, all manner of work. They had no identifiable leaders and it was nearly impossible to see through their universally shared androgyny. All pesky efforts at gendering them proved futile. This was often strange and uncomfortable for those they visited, however, after a while, the people's memory would seem to shift and they found the experience of these roving nomads quite delightful and inspiring. The cultures in each visited place would slowly morph as the awakening of everybody's other half, which had been dormant, slowly began to blossom.

This became the nomads task. They incorporated the mystery of the holy lake into new designs, patterns, weaves and crests. Their songs, comedies, poems and lore all revolved around the magical liberating pool.

Overtime, through much reflection and meditation, their mystics had developed a sort of understanding as to what happened in that place. This gave an even deeper sense of determination to the group as a whole. It was their destiny to travel the world dispersing the waters of the lake until everything had been transformed.

And so, they did. As such, from that point on, civilizations failed to emerge, empires never arose, ecologies which had spent millennia healing cycles of violence were never profaned again and no individual ever found themselves oppressed. The cosmos had aligned at a time in between miseries, a time when things were calm and regenerating. The nomads were able, year after year, to spread the glow to these new generations capable of receiving it. This tradition was their task, they lived for it, it defined them, it defined their

## Time Capsule

I decided to destroy my time capsule when I could no longer deny the trends in civilization would only continue to make all circumstances for life on Earth, and potentially the entire galaxy, increasingly dire. Any further glimpses into the future would probably only have revealed further disasters which, in their boring redundancy and tiresome frivolity, stopped requiring that I observe them.

It didn't help that the hull of my wooden sphere was deteriorating in an uncanny parallel with the integrity of the human condition. To force my own hand, which seemed content to sit in this nullified complacency for eternity, I broke some irreplaceable tubing somewhere beneath some shielding. This was around the time of late 2021. I really needed to see if I could help these people get out of their conundrum before it was too late, even if it was already too late, it was a personal goal.

My descent through the atmosphere went fine enough. Once inside the instrument readings of air quality were surprisingly nominal, although sensors did detect a slew of pollutants. I was also fortunate enough to navigate myself to an isolated sector of the "Pacific Coast" which was registering as somewhat free of their meddling sensors. I am almost certain I was perceived as nothing more than a large piece of space debris which landed harmlessly in the ocean. I rowed for a while, eastbound, many days passed. The stars were brilliant, a strong wind and a powerful current assisted my travels, all felt auspicious.

Eventually I navigated my way into a large spit walled with massive concrete piles reminiscent of children's jacks. Heaving waves shuttled me into a large bay where I was delighted to find a small island upon which I moored my craft and made camp. My shelter was designed to mimic that of a simple houseless person. I took a keen interest toward the humans who dwelt in civilized regions in defiance of civilized norms, I fancied myself an expert. I went into town bright and early the very next day, determined as Zarathustra, which was perhaps an ill omen that deserved a bit more reflection than I gave it.

I wasted little time in my assessments. My first efforts were to put everything into interviewing as many of the passerby as I could get to speak to me. It did not take me long to realize that the agents of control had played it way too cool. The people had no idea they were being being forced to choose sides in an uncrossable divide of intellectuals and peasants. The former looking down upon the latter and vice versa, thus both sides completely negating the benefits of the other and therefore living in extreme poverty on one of two ends of a completely inane spectrum. There seemed to be no chance for them to shed their enslavement without the ability to feed themselves nor could their counterparts get free without the ability to think.

I deeply regret not noticing this trend in my prior examinations of this world. As I see it now, the situation is nearly impossible to remedy. Though I may have the vantage point of a few hundred dodecahedrons to see the situation clearly, I can't find any plausible path forward to help them escape this mess. They are simply pawns isolated in either food deserts or thought deserts, blind to their predicament, tricked into thinking their times are the best, the most advanced, the most comfortable and healthy and ethical of times when their true reality is just a blank dead uncultivated wasteland of spiritually and nutritionally deprived squalor in which they would all perish were they not fed and kept entertained.

Their whole model has been reduced to a dependence upon distances which they would starve attempting to cross on foot. Dependencies which their localities could easily provide. These distances are crossed thanks to totally inefficiently massive oil powered vessels which supply them with all that they utilize. These materials of their existence are fabricated by equally inefficient massive oil propelled vessels, a situation which only increases their disastrous desertification of the biosphere which further increases their dependence on said machines, ad infinitum. Not to mention the utter abandon of spiritual connectivity to the world via the interaction of them and their environment for the provisions essential to life...

I went home that first night to my nice island camp and felt not a little forlorn. Whatever hope I foolishly harbored has all but faded away. I miss my sweet cryostatic slumbers. There are far too many billions of dolesome complexities here.

splendid reprieve of the delightful waters. That night, the Moon rose and the lake held her image across its span. Together they glowed resplendently. When the Moon arrived at her zenith in the sky the nomads could feel a marvelous sensation swirling throughout their bodies.

Looking upon one another, they were dumbfounded. A faint image of each other's ancestors was rising from each of their heads. All the people of their individual lineages merged into one another through a long line of descent which towered up to the light of the Moon. From whence they came coalescing into the bodies of the people which they had eventually become, the individual nomad at that place in space and time.

Astonished by this experience, it was clear that the place was sacred beyond comprehension. They stayed for quite some time, enjoying the uncanny abundance which the land provided. In this rare moment of repose they mended clothes and tools, they wove new baskets, hunted and made preserves, they gathered herbs and crafted medicines, they sang new songs, told new tales and danced new dances.

One day another solar eclipse came. In the growing darkness they all looked about and realized that without a thought, they had collectively abandoned their binary social structures. Unconsciously rhythms, roles, patterns, tasks, chores, intimacies and artistic expressions now represented their natural selves as opposed to their former culturally contoured half selves.

When the eclipse reached totality the Sun was hidden again, its light ray tentacles writhed, ever frustrated, the beast desperate to escape, the grinning black Moon holding it back. The lake had begun to pulsate a faint hypnotic rainbow sheen upon its surface and all of the nomads felt an incredible gravity drawing them into it. They grabbed their waterskins and rushed to fill them in the eerie silent strangeness of the lake. Once within they could feel faint traces of the frenetic energy of its conception emanating outwards, tingling with glee, the memories of a delightful union. They were all lambent.

As the light returned to the world around them, they understood their task. As though one mind, they broke down their camps, packed their animals and fractured off into small groups who would each travel out in the eight

They did not melt, instead, their atomic structures, so agitated, simply let go of their bindings and the two stones merged into one another almost like their separation had been a deformity.

The Moon, forced by the persistent cosmos to continue her journey, gave way to the Sun, whose light grew back upon the land slowly and distraught, sensing something grandiose had taken place in his absence. The Moon passed on through the sky, grinning a grin that has never left.<sup>2</sup>

The stones were so filled with energy that they kept their radiant glow for quite some time, in this state of flux they began to sag, sinking deeper into one another, eventually spreading their melding melting bodies out upon the land which steamed beneath their magmatic touch. The persistent heat of the frustrated Sun kept the center of that odd mass warmer than the rest, which allowed for a small slump to form there. Over time rains wore this central depression deeper and wider, water lingering in a little seasonal pool, seeping slowly out, connecting with the original spring, ground water climbing to the surface. Plant life took a liking to this place and animal life followed. Uncounted years wore away at the congealed stone the pool, it grew and grew and grew until eventually it was a great lake all surrounded by fertility and abundance.

Somehow people never came here. They would go off in search of the legendary source of power that promised to bring them glory and dominion. Perhaps they would find this wetland and scoff at its soft splendor; it's languid Edenic pleasures could only mean that they were off course. Thus, the lake remained protected, a sanctuary.

One day a roving band of nomads came seeking the fabled causeway. Following the stars they came to the exact place where it ought to have been yet the arid looming stones were gone. The group knew they were not lost, their navigators were too adept to make such a mistake. Instead of worrying, they accepted that they had arrived at a lake, being nomads, they were thrilled. They swam and fished and played and made love inspired by the

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<sup>2</sup> Ah, the moon, whose pull on the Earth tilts and holds us, who gently rocks us, who makes our tides swing, who gives us seasonal shifts. The moon, without which, we would not be, the sun would shine on this world but would have nothing it now nurtures to grow. They work together tending this garden, let us never forget this.

## Famous Stories of Witches in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

As a mechanic it was my duty to attend to their broken bus when it rolled in. The repair needed was a barely noticeable task, just a new radiator hose and some fluid. All the spirits of this world I've met have barely had any comprehension of the impacts they have on unseen elsewheres. These ones were fully aware.

I am uncertain as to how they split my spirit from my body. I am certain that I watched them walk away with my flesh, up the docking ramp, into an eerie tangerine day... the wildfires had been burning for what seemed a lifetime. The air was perpetually acrid and thick with the ever present damp smoke; how can it be called humid when its source is the abolition of wetness?

The aesthetic of the sky above a world burning bares a strange ominous tone that is to be expected in such a situation. The curses left by the grandmothers of these lands, rightfully bitter, their rage completely objective, never escape my notice or understanding. Not a day goes by, even still, that I don't pine for the lands of old Europe, the departure a gift to myself and those who truly belong to this New Island.

These concepts were distracting me as I numbly watched the ladies steadily leave with my body. Somehow, when I grasped what was happening, I gathered my strength and ran to embrace myself whereupon I began to assert a claim that forced itself from me:

"I am whole, I am one body one mind, I am complete, I am my own true self."

I grabbed my body and held on tight, yet I was met with no resistance. Suddenly, a large swooshing wind overtook everything and I awoke in my skin, whole once more.

This was, it seemed, a trial, for, we then continued to walk together, myself and the witches, into the dusk until we came upon their whole gypsy caravan. Together we walked along train tracks through a vast encampment. On either side of me were cook fires warming the hands of cloaked figures.

## The Giant's Causeway

Lore tells us of two rigid stones, cold oblong ovals, looking out over their horizon for time immemorial.

In the chasm between the boulders, a gentle spring seepage whetted the land and kept it cool. A causeway passed through the stones, the origin of its formation was long forgotten or never known. Through this chasm the moon would rise in the center, its course across the sky never leaving the gap as it rode to the other side descending exactly, again, in the center. When the moon was perfectly full the glow in the middle was said to create a dire magnetism so immense that it was a marvel the stones did not collapse, falling into one another.

Countless cultures are known to have been born after gathering the mysterious powers afforded to their legions by passing through this channel. All of them have fallen. Over and again, they rose, they ravaged, they spread their thoughts, their games, their patterns, their genetics and then they all dwindled back into the nothingness they came from. How such crafty swaths could so consistently lacks the basic skills to create permanent and lasting structures always seemed ridiculous to outsiders. Traditions were already in place to last forever until they are met by hordes adamantly bent on conquest and upheaval.

One day the Earth tired of fools and their cycles. The Moon eclipsed the Sun, granting lunar influences a brief reign over the world. The Sun, a protesting beast, furiously writhed its tentacles out from behind her blackening. The Moon, wise beyond wise, employed this solar protest to increase the Earth's force whereupon the planet seized the moment and began to tremble directly beneath the two stones. The vibrations were colossal, in conjunction with the black magnetism of the Moon, the giant boulders began to fall toward one another.

When they touched, the Earth kept shaking, causing the rocks to grind creating so much friction that the stones began to glow radiantly becoming hotter and hotter until they were worked up into a glorious amorphous swirling rainbow glow, the colors pulsating through the light spectrum in a twisted geomorphic writhing ecstasy.

Obviously it was imperative that I wait for an opportunity to arise, so I continued to mix with the crowd, fraught with an immense determination to get the film no matter what.

The unfolding of things from this point on is too incredible. Everyone had been called to gather in a great hall. At the head of it were several royally adorned tentacle mouthed entities all wearing Greek robes embroidered in black thread with strange, obviously magical symbols. The sight was grotesque. I paid no heed to their speech but when I identified their leader, I rushed forward and blew a party horn into their mouth. Their head burst like confetti but the cloak concealing their body did not sag, it stood firm, now headless. Another of the cloaked ones began to gleefully anticipate the next moments in which the true name and form of the one I had challenged would be revealed and a battle for the new wielder of dominion would commence.

Havoc erupted but I was somehow unaccosted, perhaps even forgotten? The crowd was so intrigued by the gaiety and excitement of the astonished overlords that I was able to slip away into the theater room and extract the invaluable film from the projector. I left quickly, I had no interest in what would happen next, it was imperative to return the recording to its people.

Stoic iron cauldrons, uniquely decorated busses, groups of wolves sitting yellow eyed and idle, watching me calmly as I passed by. All was touched with a haunting beauty of steady grace. I was not blind to the sidelong glances, the frightfully discerning gazes; my confidence did not wane for I knew that the initial trial was no small test of merit.

I had somehow earned a place in this strange murder of crones. I grew anxious to learn their story. No one had spoken a word in as long as I could remember. It did not feel appropriate to. Not even the wolves made noise as they slowly revealed their teeth... indeed the only noises to be heard the pop and crackle of embers fleeing hearths.

Suddenly, everyone all at once, made to leave. I was guided to a bus whereupon I watched in awe as the tires morphed into the wheels of a train. Simultaneously, a pair of tracks emerged from the Earth for them to rest on. The tracks seemed made of bone. The busses themselves became linked and the whole caravan formed into a rustic gypsy train. There were many of us in the cars, everyone austere and minding our own. As the train began rolling, darkness fell, the cabin became lit by a faint red smokey glow accentuated by the pale creamy hue of the rising moon.

One of the passengers, a man, the first I had seen, pulled out a small revolver, which he claimed was not loaded. He pointed it towards the other riders behind me on the opposite side of the train and pulled the trigger. I became incensed with rage, though the gun fired nothing, it mattered little to me. I grabbed him by the throat and took the gun, growling at his idiocy. I unlocked the bullet chamber and was even more disturbed to find that four of its eight cylinders were actually loaded.

To defend himself, he cut my ankle with a boot knife and as I reeled, I felt that I had been trapped. He revealed a box cutter in each hand and sprung at me. A man with a white mustache and checkered shirt came rushing past me to get to safety, I grabbed at him and held the poor soul in front of me as a shield. I felt incredibly ignoble but had no time for remorse as my assailant lunged at me with his razor blades leaving an opening for me to grab both of his forearms. He was still able to dig his left blade into my right wrist far too close to the artery. It certainly promised an imperiled extraction. I took his other blade and plunged it into his neck twice, hitting the jugular vein on the second stab.

I pushed him to the rear of the train watching as slumped into the stupor of exsanguination, gritting his ugly teeth yet showing no other sign of pain. The door opened by no hand and I threw him out of the train, uncertain as to whether or not that was a sufficient dispatch. The door closed itself.

Regaining my composure from the exertion, I was approached by one of the women who originally brought in her bus for repair, she had an elastic band to tie off my veins before removing the blade and pressed a gauze to the wound to stop the blood. The bandage smelled of roses and myrrh. After a few minutes my breath calmed and she removed the gauze revealing the wound fully healed, betrayed only by a trace of fresh pink scar tissue. She grinned softly and gave me a fresh dressing for my ankle.

I took my seat and wondered where we were headed.

## The Gala

The entire structure was made of the finest wood sanded to a marble sheen, beautifully streaked and swirling grains of yellow and purple. I made my way to the third floor which seemed unoccupied. It wasn't.

About the whole floor were all manor of chamber, each filled with decadent quantities of art. One of the residents of the place took a liking to me. He brought me to a room where I could see a mountain, sparsely capped with snow; the end of summer and the resilience of drought.

Suddenly much was astir, apparently a gay festivity had commenced. Moving through the halls freely I chanced upon a woman staring at a huge sheet of glass which separated her from another room. Beyond the wall of glass was another woman pretending to be her reflection. The two were engaging in the hostilities of pomp, a deeply complex existentialist pantomime. They also could have been acting like roosters.

From there I passed into a room which played an immersive reel of film in which a Karuk man was performing an old ritual where made friction shavings on a cedar plank in a gradient from dark umber to light yellow pale, displaying incredible prowess and control. Once the shavings were blown away the embers would slowly burn wide conical impressions onto the plank. Once these finished, the man, covered in fine shell, feather, fur and stone regalia, would pour some taffy clay like substance into the divots, presumably to make cups or bowls or disks or tokens, measures of his embers' worth. At one point in the film he mentioned that the Japanese do this as well.

The reel came to an end, the film flapping freely and people began to mill about, moving on to the rest of the evening. It occurred to me that I was in an annex where the first recordings of the indigenous tribes of the west coast were kept. Treasures of heritage tucked away, inaccessible to their people, their descendants, people to whom this knowledge is essential. This information a paradoxical, but none the less vital, connection to their past.

I had just witnessed an ancient aspect of their culture and I was much obliged to steal the medium which contained it.